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The Museum Free to All

At the annual meeting of the Trustees of the Museum held on Thursday, January 17, it was

Voted, That the Museum should be open free until further notice, subject to such regulations as may be determined upon by the Committee on the Museum.

The action of the Board was taken in pursuance of a recommendation by the President of the Museum expressed as follows in the concluding section of Mr. Gray's annual report presented at the meeting :

"In these tragic days the Museum should be opened free to all who wish the help that art is privileged to give : free entirely, or, if that be deemed unwise, free to a much greater degree than it is at present ; and this not merely because it would increase presumably the number of visitors, but rather because it would develop a deeper interest in the Museum through the substitution of equality of privilege in place of the constant differentiation between those who pay and those who do not pay — that equality of privilege which goes far towards making a great public library the intellectual home of the people. Many arguments can be made against this proposition, perhaps the strongest is the additional expense at this time of heavy deficits. It is true that the money received through paid admissions would be lost ; but this, amounting as it does to less than 3 per cent. of the running expenses, is a small matter. It is true, also, that the money received from annual subscribers might be materially lessened ; and this would be serious, because the subscriptions amount now to about 20 per cent. of the expenses. Yet be this as it may, the question is far greater than the question of money. It is a question of rendering the greatest service at the time of the world's direst need. Although unaided by State or city, let us not, at least in these days, sell the service that it is possible for the Museum to render. Let us swing the doors wide and make the entrance as free as is the entrance to the parks of a great city. As they give the beauty of nature, let us see to it that the Museum gives, as far as in it lies, the beauty of art ; let us make that beauty free to all."

The decision of the Trustees to put this recommendation into immediate effect ends a practice followed since the Museum was opened in 1876. The gift to the Museum by the City of the site of the first building on Copley Square — the only gift from a public source ever received by the Museum during its whole history — was conditioned upon free opening during at least four days each month. In compliance with this condition, the Museum has been open free on Saturdays from the beginning, and since 1877, when the building was opened free on Sundays also, the condition has been doubly met. The five other weekdays, excepting when public holidays, have from the first remained days of paid admission. The sum received from entrance fees on these days has continued to be a source of revenue too considerable to neglect. It is at length dispensed with altogether in the confident expectation that the private gifts on which the Museum exclusively depends will eventually, and perhaps at once, more than make good the loss.

The step is one of far-reaching significance. In abolishing admission fees the Museum announces once for all that, although wholly supported by private gifts, its intents and purposes are those of a public institution. The needs of the hour have inspired the resolve. What the Museum collections can offer in refreshment of spirit and inspiration of purpose shall no longer be exchanged for money, but granted without price.